



The Guardians of the Cedars issued the following communiqué:

There was uproar in the domestic and international - especially European – media coverage of the death sentences that were carried out last week. Opinions varied in the extremes, ranging from proponents to opponents, and everyone in between with reservations, and we felt it is our duty to be on record with our own position and make a few comments on the issue.

To start with, we are categorically against the politics of violence and killing, and we oppose the death penalty on principle. We believe there are reasons behind every crime, and addressing those reasons would eliminate or at least reduce the incidence of crimes. God is the life-giver and he alone can take it back. We draw these beliefs from our Phoenician heritage. Our ancestors practiced them in their public life and in their many travels and conquests, and we have inherited those principles and beliefs from them and abided by them during the Lebanese War when we refused to be drawn into the culture of wanton mass murder that was common at the time.

Yet, social tradition among humans has allowed for the principle of killing in exceptional circumstances such as self-defense, national defense, and the protection of society. Legislators have spent time and effort elaborating legal spaces that define the contexts and boundaries within which to deal with this question.

Before Europe abolished the death penalty not too long ago, it prepared its societies by providing them with an environment of freedom and democracy. It liberated them from the yokes of social and economic oppression that often were the cause of crime. Which is why we believe Europe to be mistaken when it asks the Third World to follow suit and abolish the death penalty among its backward societies, reeling under enslavement, poverty, and fear of the future, all factors constituting a breeding ground for all kinds of violence. What else then is behind this massive and almost suicidal human migration from those societies to the shores of Europe? It is in the interests of the European Union to contribute to the development of the countries of the Third World and help them promote their societies before asking them to abolish the death penalty and prevent illegal emigration to the EU.

Unfortunately, Lebanon today fits the mold of a Third World country, and it would be wrong to abolish the death penalty before eliminating the motives for crime. The first such motive for crime in Lebanon is life under foreign occupation and repression, poverty and want, instability and fear of the future. Not to mention the absolute state of anarchy and insecurity in the country, and the corruption that is endemic all the way to the top of the state's institutions.

For all these reasons, and while we support last week's death sentences against the three criminals for the heinous nature of their crimes, albeit with reservations on the sectarian quota that was applied in selecting the three individuals, we demand in no uncertain terms that the same penalty be extended to those at the top before it is applied to the average man on the street. It ought to begin at the top of the pyramid and all the way down to the last petty boss who have sentenced the entire nation, starved its people, robbed its treasury, pilfered its money, and emptied the country of the vital force of its young people.

Short of all this, things will not improve in Lebanon, instability will continue to plague the country, insecurity will remain rampant, and the death penalty will not be a deterrent if it applied only to the little criminals.

Lebanon, at your service,
Abu Arz,
January 24, 2004